

Luke 24:13-35 (NRSV)

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the

road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

About 50 minutes from now, we will engage in a time-honored ritual of Christian worship. No, not communion – not even the passing of the peace. No, it's a ritual that strikes fear into the heart of every pastor – we call it the handshake line.

Back at the church where I did my internship on Capitol Hill, I used to shake hands with people who seemed vaguely familiar, and it turned out that they were Cabinet officials or Supreme Court justices or something like that. Our handshake line is a little less stressful than that but only a little bit, because I take it as my goal that I recognize and greet by name everyone whom I have ever met and also to know the people whom I haven't ever met and learn their names and important things about them so that I will recognize them and greet them by name if I ever meet them again.

Obviously, this is a hopeless task. Cognitive psychologists tell us that we can only know a maximum of 350 people, plus or minus a few and I worry that once you get past there, each new person drives an existing one out of your memory. I know that I have blanked on some of your names and I appreciate your kindness in overlooking this periodic failing. I live in fear that one day I will forget Linda's name since she might be less forgiving.

Today's Gospel lesson provides some small bit of consolation. Two pilgrims leaving Jerusalem for a little village called Emmaus are met by a man whom they don't recognize. The stranger is their Risen Lord. We don't know why they don't recognize him – the text says their eyes were “kept from recognizing him” so it may be that God somehow keeps their eyes dull. Or, it may be that the Risen Lord is always hard to recognize.

Barbara Brown Taylor makes this point preaching on this text. The resurrection appearances of Christ are always a little mysterious, a little ghostly. His is a solid body that can enter a locked room. He can't be recognized except by his wounds. He eats and drinks, but then disappears. Now, the crucifixion stories are all solid, factual reports. Jesus is nailed to the cross and a nameplate is nailed above his head and he dies in front of a hundred eyewitnesses. But the resurrection appearances always contain a certain amount of mystery, require a certain amount of faith, a certain suspension of disbelief.

As you all know, we have been thinking a lot about discipleship at Saint Nicholas. What might it mean if we were to put discipleship, put the forming of disciples as our first priority? In that sense, this story of an encounter on the road to Emmaus is a practically perfect discipleship story. First, it tells the story of a journey, just in the same way that discipleship is a journey. Second, it is not a solitary journey but rather a story about two people walking together and discipleship is all about relationship. Third, it is an encounter, a meeting with the Risen Lord, just as discipleship is an encounter with the Risen Lord. Where two or more are gathered, Christ will be found. Fourth, it is teaching and learning, teaching and learning about scripture and about life and that is what discipleship is all about. One disciple, Cleopas, tells the stranger the story of the life and the death of Jesus, and about what has happened after the death of Jesus. But the stranger has something to offer, too – as it turns out, he is the only one who

does know what has taken place in Jerusalem. And so, the stranger opens the Scriptures to them. Fifth, there is service – the disciples welcome and feed the stranger, as disciples always welcome and feed the stranger. But there is not just journey and relationship, encounter, learning and service, there is transformation -- how the disciples hearts burn as they walk with the stranger, how their hearts and eyes are opened at the breaking of the bread.

The disciples ask Jesus to stay, and he does, for a while, long enough to be revealed to them. But then he is on his way – we always ask him to stay, and he always asks us to follow, to Galilee or back to Jerusalem, to the country or to the city, not where we are but rather where he needs for us to be, where he needs for us to meet him again in the breaking of the bread, in the eyes of those in need of food or comfort or peace. There were only a few of us at Soup and Study this past Wednesday, and I was surprised at how grateful I was for that, because these were a few people whom I've come to know well and to love as fellow disciples in whom I can easily see the face of Christ. And it felt a lot like that conversation on the road to Emmaus must have felt, because we could share our hopes and our fears with each other, with people who knew us and understood us and shared those hopes and fears.

Don't misunderstand me, I love seeing so many people here on Sunday getting together, telling the stories of their week, making contact again with this family of faith. But I think of how much people miss if they only come to church on Sundays. There's the basic fellowship during the week, of course, the time to talk and laugh and reflect on how our lives are going. There's the time to really get into scripture and to learn its deeper lessons. There's the chance to share life lessons with people who have made many of the same choices and commitments that you've made. There's the chance to work and plan for things like the North Wing and VBS and new worship forms and experiences, to have a say in how our faith life together will be formed and conducted. At Soup

and Study we were reflecting on how over-programmed we are, moving from one thing to the next without a moment to think about what we're doing and why. And we talked about the kind of vicious circles we get in – we come or come back to church because we want our children to have the experience of a life of faith, but it's our children that keep us so wonderfully busy that we sometimes don't have the time and energy to get as involved in church or other activities as we'd like.

When I talked with the most recent new members' class, I extended to them an invitation I'd like to make to all of you as well. It's reasonable, I think, for you to expect excellence in worship at Saint Nicholas with sermons that are thoughtful and thought-provoking and that express and explain the Good News and why it is both Good and News. You should expect music and prayer and speech that are joyful and reverent. You should expect, too, opportunities to grow spiritually and in service, in classes and small groups. But it is also true that the community here at Saint Nicholas will depend on you to participate in worship on a regular basis, in small groups, in service and education, that you will support the community with your prayers, your time and your treasure. In short, that you will, as I told the new members' class, honestly engage in deepening your discipleship in Christ. As we walk this road together, I imagine that we will continue to flesh out what discipleship means for us, but commitments to love God, love one another, to teach and to learn and to serve the world are good places to start.

Two pilgrims left Jerusalem for Emmaus, a journey, they thought, of only seven miles, a journey of discipleship. Along the way, they were joined by a man they didn't recognize. It seems like we never do. But he recognized them, as he always recognizes us, thank God. And nothing was ever the same again. It never is.

Amen.